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FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0536
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA PRIORITY 0207
RUEHUP/AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST PRIORITY 0187
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2703
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0316
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4993
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1376
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE PRIORITY 1124
RUEHRA/AMEMBASSY RIGA PRIORITY 0180
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY 1249
RUEHSF/AMEMBASSY SOFIA PRIORITY 0458
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 001898

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER'S
"DOUBTS" OVER URUZGAN EXTENSION

REF: THE HAGUE 1856 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Roland Arnall, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Dutch Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Finance Wouter Bos remains wary of extending the Dutch deployment to Southern Afghanistan, on the grounds that Dutch and NATO forces are unlikely to achieve meaningful reconstruction results in the current security environment. As the leader in Cabinet of the second-largest party in PM Balkenende's coalition government, Bos' support will be crucial in reaching a decision to extend the deployment. Bos has requested a meeting with either Secretary Rice or Deputy Secretary Negroponte during his upcoming trip to Washington

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DC; Post supports this request. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In a October 15 meeting with Ambassador Arnall, Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Finance Wouter Bos (the senior member of the Labor Party (PvdA) in PM Balkenende's coalition government) described the results of the Dutch presence in the southern Afghan province of Uruzgan so far as "not good enough." Asked whether he was referring to reconstruction efforts or military operations, he replied: "both." Clarifying, Bos said Dutch troops on the ground have so far not been able to establish a satisfactory security environment to allow significant development projects to proceed. On the contrary, Dutch troops recently had to call in additional Dutch and Gurkha forces "just to defend themselves." Under these circumstances, he added, it was doubtful that meaningful reconstruction activity could take place, even after a possible extension of the Dutch deployment past the summer of 2008. Citing a Dutch proverb, Bos described current Dutch efforts as "mopping the floor while the tap is still running."

13. (C) Ambassador Arnall stressed that the operation in Southern Afghanistan is a joint, NATO-led effort. A decision to pull out the Dutch troops at the end of their current

2-year deployment would have serious consequences for the entire NATO mission, and for the Afghan people. Bos replied that he had "no doubts" a Dutch decision against extending would negatively impact the NATO operation; on the other hand, he had "real doubts" regarding how much good could be accomplished by Dutch and NATO forces in the current environment. Bos noted that the GONL is analyzing the situation to determine whether serious reconstruction efforts will be possible in Uruzgan in the foreseeable future. He made clear that the results of this analysis will be an important factor in the extension debate.

14. (C) Bos said he was also "disappointed" by the lack of NATO partners stepping forward to assist in the southern Afghan provinces. The recent German decision to extend its mission in the North, he added, was a positive step, but would not have much of an impact in the South, where most of the heavy fighting was taking place. In response to a question from Ambassador Arnall, Bos said he was not particularly hopeful about the future; the situation in Afghanistan is a "complicated picture," and he was "not very sure" that extending the Dutch presence would accomplish anything useful.

COMMENT:

15. (C) As the leader of the second largest party in the Balkenende IV coalition government, Wouter Bos' support is essential for the Cabinet to make a positive decision to extend the Uruzgan mission. Post has heard repeatedly from multiple sources that Bos is personally skeptical of the mission, and under considerable pressure from within his own party to oppose an extension. His remarks to Ambassador Arnall certainly do nothing to dispel this view. On the

other hand, the Labor Party continues to lose ground in the polls, and Bos is still trying to consolidate his leadership following a recent challenge from former Development Minister Jan Pronk -- the last thing he wants is a government crisis leading to early elections his party is certain to lose. Most observers believe Bos will eventually sign on to an extension -- and bring his party faction along in Parliament -- provided there is sufficient political cover (i.e., additional troops on the ground from third parties filling the "modules" identified by the GONL) and Bos is able to win a significant concession from his coalition partners on an important domestic issue (e.g., reform of the Labor laws.)

16. (C) Bos' upcoming visit to the U.S. to attend World Bank and IMF meetings (see septel) provides a good opportunity to reinforce our support for extending the Dutch mission and to demonstrate our commitment to helping the Dutch find suitable partners in Uruzgan. He has requested a meeting with either Secretary Rice or Deputy Secretary Negroponte on Tuesday,

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October 23; for the reasons described above, Post supports this request.

Arnall